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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [JA](#)  
SUBJECT: JAPAN MOVES TO WEAKEN 1993 KONO APOLOGY ON  
"COMFORT WOMEN"

Classified By: DCM Joe Donovan. Reasons 1.4 (B),(D)

11. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Abe is directing efforts to pursue World War II historical issues, including "comfort women," LDP Diet member Yasuhide Nakayama told Embassy Political Minister Counselor Meserve on February 28. The Japanese government actions are in response to the U.S. congressional resolution seeking a formal apology for Japan's wartime acts against women forced into prostitution. Nakayama reported he has received direct instructions from LDP policy chief Shoichi Nakagawa, speaking for the Prime Minister, to press ahead with revision of the 1993 Kono Statement on "comfort women." Nakayama uncomfortably allowed to Meserve that he has misgivings about Abe's current thinking and fears the effort to lobby in the U.S. will backfire. Nonetheless, Nakayama submitted a proposal to the LDP on March 1 to revise the Kono Statement. End Summary.

"Upgrading" the Kono Statement  
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12. (C) The statement issued in 1993 by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono is regarded as Japan's first official

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acknowledgment of responsibility for abuses against the wartime "comfort women." It has been a lightning-rod for conservative groups ever since. Prime Minister Abe, following the example of his predecessors, acknowledged the Kono Statement in an October 2006 Diet session. Privately, however, according to Diet member Yasuhide Nakayama, he has instructed Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Policy Affairs Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa to work within the party framework to revise the controversial document, and correct the "mistaken" impression that the government of Japan officially ran forced prostitution centers during World War II.

13. (C) Nakayama is chair of a subcommittee on "comfort women," operating under the Committee of LDP Diet Members to Consider Japan's Future and Historical Education. The Committee, headed by former Education Minister Nariaki Nakayama, is divided into two subcommittees, one on "comfort women," and another on the Nanjing Massacre, headed by Toru Toida. (Note: Nariaki Nakayama is not related to Yasuhide Nakayama, but is married to Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Abduction Issues Kyoko Nakayama. End Note.) His subcommittee has worked closely with the Office of the Prime

Minister (the "Kantei") in carrying out its work, he told Embassy Political Minister Counselor Meserve on February 28. In the past, according to Yasuhide Nakayama, Prime Minister Abe and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura used to attend meetings of the Committee. He said his subcommittee has met five times, going through documents collected by the Cabinet Secretariat and getting feedback from historians and other individuals involved in drafting the original statement.

14. (C) In researching the "comfort women" issue, Nakayama said, he came to believe that the Kono Statement was at the heart of the problem. The language is abstract and "masochistic," he noted, leading readers to believe that Japan's government was officially involved in organizing the taking of the "comfort women" and forcing them into prostitution. Part of the problem lies in translation, he claimed. MOFA has never produced an official text, and Nakayama finds many misleading expressions in the translation that is commonly used. He added that some media outlets, including the Japan Times, have done their own translations aimed at "intentionally" misleading their readers. The subcommittee's task has been to "upgrade" the text, with the goal of preventing left-wing groups from using Kono's words to attack Japan. Nakayama assured Meserve he has tried to be careful to avoid using any language that would be damaging to the U.S.-Japan relationship.

15. (C) On March 1, Nakayama's subcommittee announced a proposal for revising the Kono Statement at LDP headquarters. He furnished the Embassy with a preliminary draft on February 28. The proposal will now be submitted to the LDP's Education Division and Policy Deliberation Commission, and if approved, then to the LDP leadership and the Kantei.

#### Conflicting Instructions from the Prime Minister's Office

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16. (C) Prime Minister Abe and his staff were aggressive in pursuing the "comfort women" issue to counter the U.S. congressional resolution, according to Nakayama. When Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Public Relations Hiroshige Seko met with Nakayama prior to Seko's February trip to Washington, he told him he would be conducting a press briefing in front of Capital Hill to discuss the issue. Nakayama said he warned Seko at the time to deal with the issue in a more restrained manner, and thinks his advice paid off. After the visit, Seko spoke with Nakayama again and counseled him to "not get too excited" about the "comfort women" issue. He told Nakayama that the Kantei wanted to avoid creating any controversy between the United States and Japan so close to the Prime Minister's upcoming summit with the President. Earlier press reports had been playing up the opposite angle, criticizing the MOFA and the Japanese Embassy in Washington for not doing enough to head off the resolution, and noting that passage of the resolution would damage U.S.-Japan ties.

17. (C) LDP policy chief Nakagawa acknowledged Seko's softening position on the issue, but gave Nakayama a different message, telling him to push ahead more aggressively than ever, on the Prime Minister's direct orders. That conversation notwithstanding, Nakayama believes the Kantei has realized that it needs to put on the brakes, based on advice from MOFA, the Japanese Embassy in Washington, and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. He continues to receive pressure from Nakagawa, however, and wonders if Abe will be able to moderate his position. Many LDP members, including most of the current cabinet, do not really back the language of the Kono Statement, Nakayama noted, but they are also conscious of preserving the balance between their political interests, Japan's national interest, and the U.S.-Japan relationship. Committee Chairman Nariaki Nakayama has now told Yasuhide Nakayama that an "upgraded" version of the Kono Statement is no longer necessary. Committee General Secretary Kyoko Nishikawa has said, "the matter should not be

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aggravated."

#### Nakayama in the Middle

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¶8. (C) Nakayama had no intention of becoming the front man for Japan's right-wing, he stressed, but was appointed to the chair based on comments he made at the first Committee meeting. At this point, all he wants is for Japan to deal with the issue calmly, and to avoid pushing Abe's popularity any lower. While he has come under some pressure from his colleagues to argue more aggressively against the Honda resolution, he believes such efforts would be counterproductive for both Japan and the United States.

#### Nanjing Massacre More Problematic

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¶9. (C) Nakayama said he believes his presence on the "comfort women" subcommittee acts as a neutralizing factor, but worries much more about the subcommittee on the Nanjing Massacre. Toida and core member Yohei Matsumoto are very nationalistic, he warned, and want to start a national-level campaign denouncing the common view held by China and many others on Japan's responsibility for the atrocities committed on Nanjing's residents. Toida is a member of an ultra conservative religious organization and holds strong beliefs on the issue. Nakayama said he has cautioned them about the dangers of "blind patriotism" as a force to destroy the nation.

#### Comment

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¶10. (C) The proposal for an "upgraded" version of the Kono Statement given to us by Nakayama is problematic. It begins by taking issue with a number of contentious but not major historical points, and buries at the very end of the text a reasonable paragraph noting the harm caused toward the "comfort women," repeating an apology from Japan, and committing to continue study of the historical issues. Nakayama admitted that engaging aggressively on the issue would only serve to raise the profile and spin up the importance of this issue. He agreed that the issue was best

left to the historians, not the politicians. Nakayama announced several weeks ago that he would be leading a delegation to the United States to confront the issue, but has made no concrete plans for a trip at this time.  
SCHIEFFER